



## Caring for the Site of the Smallpox Vaccination

The smallpox vaccine contains a live virus called vaccinia. After vaccination, this live virus is present at the vaccine site and can be spread to other parts of the body or to other individuals through contact. To avoid this, the vaccination site must be cared for carefully until the scab that forms after vaccination falls off on its own, usually, in 2 to 3 weeks.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO AFTER VACCINATION:

Cover the vaccination site loosely with a gauze bandage, using medical tape to keep it in place. Keep it covered until the scab has separated on its own. This bandage will provide a barrier to protect against spread of the vaccinia virus.

*\*\*Health care workers involved in direct patient care should cover the gauze with a semi-permeable dressing as an additional barrier.*

You can wear a shirt that covers the vaccination site as an extra precaution to prevent spread of the vaccinia virus. This is particularly important in situations of close personal contact.

- Change the bandage every 1–2 days. This will keep skin at the vaccination site from softening and wearing away.
- Wash hands with soap and warm water after direct contact with the bandage or after direct contact with the vaccination site. This is vital in order to remove any virus from your hands and prevent contact spread.
- Keep the vaccination site dry. Cover the vaccination site with a water-resistant pad, such as a waterproof band-aid, when you bathe. Remember to change back to the loose gauze bandage after bathing.
- Put the contaminated bandages in a sealed plastic bag and throw them away.
- Wash clothing or any other material that comes in contact with the vaccination site. Use hot water with detergent and/or bleach.
- When the scab comes off, throw it away in a sealed plastic bag (remember to wash your hands afterwards).

### WHAT YOU SHOULD NOT DO:

- Don't use a bandage that blocks all air from the vaccination site. This may cause the skin at the vaccination site to soften and wear away. Use loose gauze secured with medical tape to cover the site.
- Don't put salves or ointments on the vaccination site.
- Don't scratch or pick at the scab.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT: [www.health.state.ny.us](http://www.health.state.ny.us)

QUESTIONS? CALL (888) 246-2675 (English) • (888) 246-2857 (Español) • (866) 874-2646 (TTY)

or email to [nyhealth@health.state.ny.us](mailto:nyhealth@health.state.ny.us).

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and New York State Department of Health